



SCULPTOR

OF light

ART MEETS SCIENCE IN MICHAEL SESTAK'S ILLUMINATED WORKS.

BY JOAN WATERS

There's a magic in the beauty of light that has the power to amaze. Put the right materials into the hands of someone who understands that power (along with amps, volts, watts, circuits and all of that), and the result is an art piece that can steal your breath away and light your path at the same time. Such are the works of Michael Sestak, a Sacramento lighting designer and electrician whose art just happens to be lighting. It wasn't always. At one time, Sestak was a pastry chef, but after an industrial accident ended his career creating confections, he regrouped. "I know it sounds crazy," he says. "How do you go from working with flour and sugar to working with electricity? The answer is you follow the creative thread." He went to school and became an electrician, passing the state test the first time. He calls that accomplishment his "golden ticket" to becoming a contractor. Opting to focus on lighting only, Sestak began turning out one-of-a-kind, precisely engineered, solidly anchored chandeliers, track lighting systems and gracefully suspended sculptures. Art met science. Sestak's been ignoring the limits of conventional lighting solutions ever since.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVE ADAMS



GARDEN ON THE CEILING

If you've seen Dale Chihuly's "Fiori di Como" chandelier at the Bellagio hotel in Las Vegas, Lina and Kenneth Fat's dining room in Sierra Oaks probably will bring that astonishing glass garden to mind. But there's much more to the Fats' art-filled ceiling than that. "This was about lighting the table as well as providing art," Sestak says. The lighted candy-colored array is composed of 30-some handblown glass "blossoms" that Lina found on a trip to a Las Vegas trade show with her friend, interior designer Bernadette Chiang. The manufacturer told Lina that the brilliantly hued glass discs, which measure roughly 18 inches across and weigh about eight pounds apiece, were for wall decoration only. Period. End of story. Lina thought differently. She bought 17 on the spot, confidently turning them over to Sestak and introducing him to artist and stainless steel fabricator Keith Peschel of Rock and Iron Design in Shingle Springs. Sestak looked at the glass pieces,

asked Lina for about 20 more and came up with a three-dimensional glass garden that Lina loved. Installation began by laying out the design on the floor under the 18-by-8-foot sky-lighted space. Each disc was then affixed to the ceiling with an individually configured armature of 1-inch hollow stainless steel pipe. "Hollow so we could run power through it and put LED lights behind each piece," Sestak explains. "We'd drill the hole and put the stainless steel tube into the ceiling, through the Sheetrock and up another eight inches to a plywood deck." Dimmable halogen spotlights on flexible "tendrils" were included to illuminate the glass pieces as well as focus light on individual place settings, the center of the table or artwork on the facing wall. "Michael and Keith made the glass almost come alive," Lina says. "It's so different from what I saw, which was the pieces hanging flat on the wall. That was OK, but it was nothing spectacular like this."

THE POWER OF 10

As guests climb the stairs at Jeanne Reaves' home in Campus Commons, she doesn't give them any clues about the sight waiting for them at the top. But when they reach the second floor and turn around, the glorious symmetry of the chandelier in the stairwell hits them all at once. "It's just breathtaking," Reaves says of the light sculpture Sestak designed specifically for her and for that space. "I always keep my ears wide open to what I'm hearing from clients so I can get clues and ideas about what would fit, what might work," Sestak says. The solution for Reaves involved 10 delicately rendered panes of frosted acrylic material, strung like pearls on circular bases. Measuring about 4 feet from the ceiling to the tip of panels, the sculpture culminates in a snowflake-like star of Swarovski crystal. "Jeanne's is a very tailored home, so I needed to create something somewhat feminine, yet very clean and open—not too clustered or too massive," Sestak says. "This shape was a real winner. It was a wonderful opportunity to fill that space elegantly."



TOP: DAVE ADAMS; BOTTOM: ANDY PISHALNIKOFF



BEAUTY IN BIOLOGY

Getting the shape of the sculpture right was just one of the challenges presented by the stairwell in Cecilia Delury and Vincent Jacobs' Carmichael home. Sestak had to figure out how to fill that voluminous vertical space, complement the home's contemporary style, and, oh yes, safely and securely install a work of impressive size. It's about 18 feet in length, from head to tail. "There was the design issue, yes, but Michael also had sophisticated

engineering considerations, too," Jacobs says. "He had decisions to make about the choice of materials and also in the machine work that was involved in putting the pieces together." Delury and Sestak worked together through just two design iterations before coming up with a spiral based on the double helix structure of the DNA molecule (an art-meets-science application if ever there was one). The space measures about 12 feet from ceiling to skylight, and the

sculpture, composed of ¼-inch thick colorless beveled panes of tempered glass, drapes another 5 to 6 feet into the stairwell. Spanning 6 feet at the top, it's anchored to a steel beam that traverses a skylight. A reinforced frame in the attic supports the weight, and the spiral is outfitted with a cable so it can be raised or lowered for cleaning or re-lamping. A dimmer adjusts the intensity of sparkle. "It's magnificent," Jacobs says simply. "It gives us joy every day." ■